

The Mind-Set of the Believer

World-Views of History

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If there is one thing that the history of the twentieth century has taught us it is that *ideas* matter. The two most destructive forces of this century – Nazism and Communism – were both based on fundamental *ideas* and corresponding *world-views* that guided and controlled the thoughts and actions of the leaders and followers of those movements. In each case it can be plausibly argued that these *ideologies* – which were in effect *secular religions* - came into existence and gained popularity because of a spiritual vacuum that existed due to the failure of the Christian societies in which they took hold to practice *biblical* Christianity. The result was untold suffering and horror for many, many millions of people, including some 150 million dead. Far from being a century of progress, the 20th century was, by far, the most destructive century in the history of mankind.

Of course, in another sense there *has* been great progress in this century. But much depends on how we define progress. If we speak of progress in science, technology, or even, in gaining human or civil rights, there has been undeniable progress in this century – especially in the last 50 years. But if we are speaking of moral or spiritual progress – based on biblical standards of becoming Christ-like – the last century has been amongst the worst in history.

Here, then, we come to the crucial issue of world-view: by whose world-view, or standards, do we judge progress? Do we judge by God's standards? Or, do we judge by the standards of other religions? Or, do we judge by the standards of modern scientific and secular man?

Of course, for Christians the answer is obvious: we judge by God's standards as recorded in the Bible. Nevertheless, it is useful to put matters in historical perspective in order to understand the issue of world-view from a biblical point of view. Throughout history there have been three basic ways of looking at the meaning of history and the meaning of life. In other words, there have been three basic world-views. As a history teacher I usually begin my history classes by explaining these different 'philosophies of history' to my students so as to add relevance to what we're studying. Although there is often overlap of these world-views in practice, it is still useful to look at each of them on their own merits. We can list them as follows:

1. The Judeo-Christian, or monotheistic, concept of history. This concept of history as taught in the Bible declares that a sovereign, loving, and personal God created the world. It was created with a specific purpose in mind and is being guided to the fulfillment of that purpose by that same God. This view includes the ideas that man was created in God's image, that man is responsible to God for living in accordance with God's will, and that man will one day give an account of himself to God at the final judgment. In this view the world was created good but was corrupted by sin – from which all the problems of mankind have stemmed. However, a time is coming when God will rectify this situation, and it is toward this specific point in time that all history is moving.
2. The mythological, or polytheistic, view of history. This is characterized by ancient Greco-Roman, Oriental, or even, Barbarian mythologies. It includes not only the religious ideas of the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Sumerians, Norse, and Celts, but also, the Indians of the Americas and so on. From a biblical perspective this view of history is a perversion or degradation of the

biblical view and one can see many forms of it in the biblical accounts of both the Old and New Testaments. One need only compare the different creation accounts of antiquity with the biblical view to see the glaring differences. The gods of mythology were, in effect, made in the image of sinful man. They had human characteristics and were constantly in competition with each other. They were often capricious, could be placated or manipulated by people, and, they were no clearer on the meaning of life than your average person today. In this view of life, history is not going anywhere and the best one can do is to hope that the real and immortal 'self' or 'soul' will 'escape' to some outer realm of 'eternity' – or something similar - at death. From this view comes our modern new age movement – perhaps in combination with number 3 below – as well as all forms of magic, astrology, eastern religions, and, unfortunately, much that has been mixed into many present-day forms of Christianity as well.

3. The evolutionary, or atheistic, view of history. This began in the mid 19th century with the publication of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, though it had some precursors in other forms in earlier years. This view of history – as seen from a purely scientific point of view - is based on the ideas that life and the universe have come about by accident and, therefore, with no specific or guiding purpose in mind. Evolution simply progresses through natural selection and the result is the survival of the fittest. It is this view of history that is the most influential in educational and academic circles today. But, it should be firmly noted that the two most destructive forces of our century – Nazism and Communism – were specifically based on the evolutionary view of history. And, it is difficult to disagree that if this world-view is correct then the

view, “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” – i.e., hedonism - is logically a valid option for life. If evolution in its atheistic form is true, then on what possible basis can any moral or ethical system be built or justified? The only valid outcome of such an evolutionary view is *moral relativism* - any opinion about ethical values is of no more validity than any other opinion since, without a God, there are no absolute moral standards at all.

The Christian World-View

The Christian world-view as presented in the New Testament contrasts sharply with the mythological, evolutionary, and even, traditional institutional Christian views. It is based on the Jewish conception of the two ages that was taken up and expanded on by Christ and his disciples. According to the New Testament, the present age, running from Adam to Christ, is marked by sin, evil, and death. In fact, the present age is not only characterized as evil and controlled by “the god of this age,” but it is also in the process of “passing away.” In contrast, the future age – the age of the kingdom of God – is marked by glory, honor, and immortality. It will be manifested in all its glory at Christ’s return, but, it is already at work in this present age by the power of God’s Spirit – the first installment of that coming age.

The New Testament envisions no hope for permanent peace in this age, or, of a restoration of this world apart from God’s redemptive work in Christ. From the New Testament perspective, the *only* hope for individuals, or for the created world as a whole, is what God accomplishes in Christ. This truth is set forth clearly in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenlies with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in

him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ (Eph. 1:3-10).

The believer's proper response to God's grace in Christ is to live according to the new standards, goals, and mind-set of all that God *has, is, and will* accomplish in Christ. These truths are set forth clearly in Romans chapter 12 and II Corinthians 3:

*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world [age], but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve [discern, ascertain] what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom. 12:1-2 NIV).*

*And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being **transformed** into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

The perspective of these verses is based on the truth that “in Christ” the Christian believer has already entered into the blessings of the age to come - even while still continuing live amidst the sin, decay, and mortality of this present evil age. This new mode of life, outlook, and living - in Christ - is “counter-culture” to the worldly standards of this age. Believers are moving to towards a known destination and goal – the glory that will be revealed at Christ's return (Rom. 8:18-25). Therefore, we are to renew our minds to this truth and be transformed by the power of God's Spirit within us. This is the goal of the Christian life – to become like Christ! The process of glorification begins in this age, through the renewed mind walk and transforming power of God's Spirit. But, it will only be completed in all its glory at Christ's return.

The Mind-Set of the Believer

For those who are now in Christ there is a new *life*, a new *world-view* of life, and a new way of *living* life. The old ways of living, thinking, and acting are said to be “in Adam” or “in the flesh”. But these have been superceded by a new mode of existence “in Christ” or “in the Spirit.” Therefore we are to set our minds on the things of the Spirit and to walk, or live, according to the Spirit. Paul's Letters to the Romans and Galatians set forth this mode of life in Christ and the corresponding mind-set of the believer:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as a sin offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be

fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

*For the **mind set on the flesh** is death, but the **mind set on the Spirit** is life and peace (Rom. 8:1-6 NASB; cf. Gal. 5:16-23).*

As Christian believers we must keep our eyes on the goal of becoming like Christ both in this life and, ultimately, in the life to come. As we do this we will walk according to the Spirit and be transformed by the renewing of our minds to be like Christ. Apart from Christ there is no hope for this world and we must not allow ourselves to be caught up into its false beliefs, standards, and goals. Let us keep our minds set on the Christ-like life and live according to the Spirit. As we do so, we will reap the matchless benefits of “life and peace.”